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Capital Circus

By ROBERT THOMPSON

Washington, June 12.—If President Kennedy carries through on his plan to fly in mid-July to the Inter-American Economic Conference in Uruguay, he will set down in the middle of a turbulent hemispheric political situation that can best be described as "a mess."

He will come face to face at the meeting in Punta del Este with one of the gravest challenges to his infant administration, and one that is much closer to home than the remote hills of Laos or the jungles of the Congo.

For between the far left of Fidel Castro's Cuba and the far right of young Ramfis Trujillo's Dominican Republic, the lands to the south are beset by turmoil.

Kennedy will attempt at the conference to take personal command of a U. S.-led drive to turn back the tide of Communism in at least a half dozen nations in the Western Hemisphere. He summoned the conference to launch his "Alliance for Progress" as the dynamic social and economic answer to Red advances in the Latin American republics.

But the task is gargantuan and it is long overdue.

In his March 14 Alliance for Progress declaration, Kennedy gave a new dimension to the Monroe Doctrine—a vast cooperative effort to help provide poverty-stricken Latin Americans with the jobs, food, homes, schools and land the Communists have promised them.

His words echoed the hopes that down-trodden Latins have harbored for centuries. Millions of peons from the Rio Grande to Cape Horn were told that, as a good neighbor, we are determined to see them rise at last above "poverty, illiteracy, hopelessness and a sense of injustice."

Now the time has come to act. Kennedy must take with him to Uruguay a series of bold proposals to begin the process of reform and regeneration that he documented.

In simplest terms, Kennedy's job is to seize the initiative by proving to the people of Latin America that democracy can provide them with the security that many believe they can win only by following Castro down the bloody Red trail.

Kennedy has these three major goals that he hopes can be achieved at Punta del Este:

1. Each of the 18 participating Latin American nations should develop long range plans for social and economic development, blueprinting the individual needs for loans and grants and exactly the types of projects required to spur their growth.

First Decide on National Reforms

2. They should agree upon principles to guide their national policies, including the need for tax revision, land reform, more equitable distribution of income, better educational facilities, improved health care, development of natural resources and other steps to end poverty.

3. As a cooperative unit, they should develop trade programs that will include a utilization of commodities—such as coffee—that are the backbone of the Latin economy, provide diversification of agriculture, and make hemispheric trade integration.

When Kennedy arrived in Paris with President de Gaulle early this month, he was encouraged to find de Gaulle interested in having the United States and Europe behind a plan to provide Latin America with financial aid, loans and trade.

In addition to tighten the ties between South America and Europe, Kennedy may see to it that observers from the Western nations sit in at Punta del Este.

He does not expect any great difficulty getting the nations to make an Alliance for Progress declaration that will achieve his three goals.



Ambassador Adlai Stevenson
He's feeling out the ground

The Slowdown Will Start at Home

He knows, however, that once the foreign ministers return home and attempt to put their declaration into effect, they will become entangled in a web of lethargy, internal political conflict and opposition from ambitious Reds and entrenched landholders.

There also is considerable division within the Administration over the advisability of Kennedy's going in person to the conference. A number of advisers feel the President should not make the speech unless he can take with him something more specific than a lofty statement of goals and an offer of future financial and technical aid.

Our UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson has been feeling out sentiment on this issue in his swing through South America and also has been attempting to determine whether Kennedy will run into any unpleasant demonstrations. Stevenson will report to Kennedy on both matters when he returns late this week.

He also probably will advise the President whether he should make an official stop only in Uruguay or should make visits to other nations.

Dillon Selected to Lead Delegation

Kennedy has named Treasury Secretary G. Douglas Dillon to head the U. S. delegation to the conference because of his understanding of world economic problems and because he performed a similar task when he was undersecretary of state in the Eisenhower Administration.

Working within the White House on an almost around-the-clock schedule to assure a strong U. S. position in Latin America are Presidential Assistant Arthur Schlesinger and Assistant Counsel Richard Goodwin.

The President knows he cannot halt the sweep of revolution through Latin America. He does believe, however, that the U. S. can identify itself so strongly with the aspirations of the discontented millions that they will turn to democracy rather than Communism.

One White House assistant sums up the situation in this way: "This conference is more urgent than what happens in Laos. If we lose two or three Latin American countries to the Communists, we have lost the balance of power in this hemisphere."